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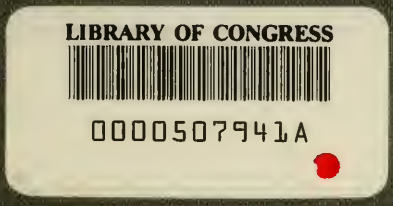

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The Louisiana Purchase and its Significance

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A DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN

The First Baptist Meeting House

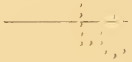
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

SUNDAY, MAY 15, 1904

BY

HENRY MELVILLE KING

PASTOR



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This discourse was prepared with no thought of publication, but simply in the ordinary course of pulpit preparation to give to a single congregation an outline of an event of great importance in our national history, whose centennial is now being appropriately celebrated in St. Louis, and to suggest its spiritual interpretation. Immediately upon the delivery of the discourse many requests were made that it might be printed for distribution and preservation. It is now printed through the generous offer of a friend who heard it.

The Louisiana Purchase and its Significance

Psalm 85: 1, 12, 13. "Lord, thou hast been favorable unto thy land; thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. * * * Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him, and shall set us in the way of His steps."

These words contain an acknowledgment and a prophecy, a grateful recognition of God's hand in past mercies and in national deliverance, and an expression of devout confidence in his continued goodness to be manifest in national growth and prosperity, not forgetting that all true growth and prosperity, national or personal, are conditioned upon righteousness of character and obedience to God's commandments.

These words were spoken by the inspired historian and prophet of ancient Israel. They are equally applicable to our land and to our

time, and can be spoken humbly and confidently by the Christian citizen of America, as he looks back over our past history, and looks out upon the future of our Republic. "Lord, thou hast been favorable unto thy land; thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. * * * Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land shall yield her increase." We are dependent utterly upon God for future prosperity and blessing. The God of the fathers must be the God of the children, the God of the founders of the Republic must be the God of their descendants. But his blessing and his prosperity are not unconditioned. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a curse to any people," and its ultimate overthrow and destruction. "Righteousness must go before him, and must set us in the way of his steps." Vice, crime, political and business corruption, unbelief and neglect of God are certain to breed rottenness in the foundations of the Republic. The God-fearing, righteous man is not only the inheritor of the past, but the conservator of the future. His faith, his righteousness gives stability to the nation, and the hope of continued and increasing prosperity and greatness.

The greatest World's Fair which this country, and perhaps the world has ever seen, is now under way in St. Louis, having been opened to the public on April 30th. The more formal services of the dedication were observed one year ago, on April 30th, 1903, being participated in by the President, the ex-President, and other dignitaries of the nation, the Governors of forty States, the diplomatic representatives of thirty nations of the world, and thousands of troops, sufficient to add splendor to the occasion and to represent the military power of a mighty Empire. But why on April 30th, 1903? Because that was the one hundredth anniversary of what is known in history as the "Louisiana Purchase," by which a territory larger by fifty-five thousand square miles than that of the original thirteen States and almost as large as Continental Europe, was purchased of France, and added to the domain of the recently founded Republic.

Few of us, perhaps, have any adequate idea of the extent of this purchase, of the circumstances which led up to it, and of its significance to the cause of human liberty and the

Protestant religion. It has been easy for those who have studied the event and its results to place it among the great events of modern history. One writer, carried away by his enthusiasm, has classed it in importance with the Declaration of Independence, the Protestant Reformation, and even with the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Another writer, with a more moderate enthusiasm and imagination, has said: "Of all distinguishing events in the glorious career of this country, aside from its triumphs for liberty and for union, none shine forth with such imperishable luster as the acquisition of that splendid empire west of the Mississippi River; and when the impartial historian shall write up the great men and the great measures of our nation he will place at the top of the rolls Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase." It will be seen, however, that Thomas Jefferson was not an active agent in the transaction, and had very little to do with it in its final outcome, except that he was President of the United States at the time, and was an unintentional and unexpected instrument

in the hands of the Almighty, who is President over all human affairs. All students of American history confess that few events have occurred on this continent or in the world, which have been followed by wider and more beneficent results, and which have exhibited more unmistakably the sudden and unlooked for ordering of divine Providence. It was as sudden and unexpected as when one bright May morning the far away Philippine Islands were tossed mysteriously into the lap of this Nation for their emancipation, and protection, and education, and became, without asking our consent, for the time being, one of the dependencies of this Republic.

But what was the previous history of this so-called Louisiana territory, and what was its extent? In the year 1682 a distinguished French explorer, Robert Cavelier, generally known as La Salle, descended the Mississippi River from its Northern waters to its mouth, for purposes of exploration, in order, it is said, to find "a trade route for the transportation of heavy skins." Sixteen years before, at the age of 23, he had migrated from France to Montreal, and became the possessor

of an estate there. But love of adventure, of discovery and of conquest had sent him forth on shorter explorations already. But this was the first time he had been led so far, and so far as known, he was the first white man to make the entire voyage to the mouth of the river. Other explorers had been associated with him or had made their own ventures into the wild new territory, uninhabited except by Indians. On the west shore of the river, about three leagues from the mouth, he erected a cross bearing the arms of the king, unfurled the flag of France, sang a Te Deum, and took possession of the territory in the name of Louis Quatorze, and named the country "Louisiana," after the king, defining the territory somewhat indefinitely as extending northward to the source of the river and along its various branches, and westward to Texas in the South and to the Rocky Mountains in the North. The area comprised nearly a million square miles, and has been subdivided into the following States and Territories: "Louisiana, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming, and included a por-

tion also of Colorado, a part of Idaho, Oklahoma and the Indian Territory." This whole central portion of our national domain, extending from the Gulf of Mexico in the South to the Great Lakes in the North, and making about one-third of our present territory, excluding Alaska, was embraced in the New French possession, called sometimes New France, and later the Louisiana Purchase. Although inhabited by scattered tribes of aborigines, frequent attempts had been made to explore it by white men, meeting hardships almost incredible, exposure, peril, starvation and death. The first explorers were Spaniards, who were animated by the same purpose which impelled Columbus "to find a water-way to Cathay, or China, and the Spice Islands, by the westward route, and to secure their rich trade. The extent of America was so little understood that much time was spent in trying to find a passage through or around our continent. Cipanzo, as Japan was called, was supposed to lie much farther East; indeed in some old maps it seems to have been included within our boundaries. It was the Spanish pioneer explorers of the sixteenth century who

first penetrated Western North America and discovered the vast extent of our country."

In 1519, only a few years after the discovery of America, Don Diego Velasquez, the Spanish governor of Cuba, sent out four caravels commanded by Don Alonzo Alvarez de Pineda, who sailed across the Gulf of Mexico, and discovered the mouth of a great river which he explored for a few leagues, and called the Rio de Espiritu Santo. This was the Mississippi River. He was probably the first white man to approach the soil of Louisiana.

In 1527, eight years later, another Spaniard, Alvah Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, sailed directly from Spain to Florida; whose swamps he crossed, and after great suffering passed beyond the Mississippi River. Nearly all of this party perished, the remainder being cast upon an island west of the mouth of the river, which they named appropriately "The Isle of Misfortunes." The stories of these early adventures, impelled by a passion for discovery or gold, are of thrilling interest.

A dozen years later, in 1539, still another Spaniard, the famous Fernando de Soto, a

governor of Cuba, sailed from Havana with six hundred men, and landed in Florida, under a commission to conquer the unknown territory of the Gulf of Mexico. He "fought his bloody way" across Florida, Georgia, and Alabama, across the Mississippi, into the Western wilds, in the vain search for gold. After three years, with ranks depleted by hunger, exposure and hostile Indians, the brave adventurer died near the mouth of the Red River, and was buried beneath the waters of the Mississippi, his survivors not daring to leave his body in a grave lest the Indians should discover it.

All these explorations, and others, took place nearly a century and a half before the Frenchman, La Salle, sailed down the "Father of Waters," and took possession of the vast territory beyond the Western bank in the name of France and Louis XIV.

It is not necessary to give in detail the subsequent vicissitudes of this new interior world. France held it for eighty years till 1762, and then ceded it to Spain to consummate a Spanish alliance. It had done nothing to occupy and develop the country, besides laying the foundations of New Orleans. It had leased it

out to traders from whom it received little revenue, and so the possession was looked upon as of comparatively little value at that time.

In 1768 the first Spanish governor came to New Orleans. At that time Spain was in possession of by far the larger part of America, Florida, a strip along the Gulf of Mexico, Texas, California, Mexico, and that large tract of territory, from the Gulf to the Lakes, out of which have been carved twelve States and two Territories, each of which is an empire in itself.

Spain held possession of the Louisiana territory for forty years, until 1801, and then tossed it back into the hands of France in return for a political favor. It had proved to be an expensive and troublesome Province. The few inhabitants were discontented and sometimes openly rebellious at the transfer from one power to another. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the thirteen original States which had entered into a compact of union and liberty under the form of a Republican Government, had received no increment of territory. They extended from Florida northward and eastward to Maine, and

westward only to the Mississippi. Our relations with France had become greatly strained. Our shipping had been exposed to the attacks of French cruisers. Protests were unavailing. An embassy was sent to France to adjust the increasing difficulties. The French Directory refused to grant it a hearing. After the dismissal of our envoys, Pinckney, Marshall and Gerry, commercial intercourse with France was suspended. War seemed inevitable. America preferred Spain to France for a back-door neighbor.

In the meantime the American settlers, on the East Bank of the Mississippi River, were demanding "the rights of navigation and commerce through the river as established by existing treaties," but which were being infringed upon and curtailed. The East sympathized with the West. Our country needed and must have an open highway for its commerce through the river which formed its Western boundary, and a right to deposit its merchandise at New Orleans, which it had acquired from Spain in 1795. It was determined to press upon France negotiations for the purchase of New Orleans and the possession of

the unrestricted use of the Mississippi.

England also was aspiring for ownership in that valley as it had done before, and was preparing itself for open hostilities against its neighbor across the Channel, so that war between the two nations seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Such in brief was the condition of things at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In 1803 Napoleon Bonaparte was the First Consul of France, Thomas Jefferson was the President of the United States, and Robert R. Livingston was our Minister to the French Court, and was under instructions to press our claims, and secure the rights of the Republic at the mouth of the Mississippi. Matters were progressing slowly, or rather not at all. Something more needed to be done. Jefferson appointed James Monroe as a special envoy to Paris, with authority to purchase New Orleans and the Floridas for $2,000,000.00. It was not then known that France had acquired from Spain only Louisiana.

But a strange Providence was working on the other side of the Atlantic. Napoleon, it is said, was attending service in Notre Dame

Cathedral on Easter Sunday. But his thoughts were not on the risen Christ and the hope of a glorious immortality which Christ's resurrection inspired, but on the hostile fleet of England sailing towards his American possessions. The purpose came to him (the Spirit of God flashed it into his mind), that he would dispose of the whole of the Louisiana territory to the United States, and be rid of the whole thing. He informed Talleyrand of his sudden purpose, who immediately saw and startled Mr. Livingston with the proposition that his country purchase the whole of Louisiana. Mr. Livingston told him he did not want it. At that time neither Jefferson nor any other American had conceived such an idea. However, he informed Talleyrand that Mr. Monroe was expected in two days, and they would take the matter into consideration. Napoleon told his ministers, and his brothers, Lucien and Joseph, who "heard the news with astonishment and indignation," and protested vehemently against Napoleon's plan, but without avail. They only met with anger and a fixed determination. He summoned Barbé-Marbois, minister of the treasury, and said to

him peremptorily: "Irresolution and deliberation are no longer in season. I renounce Louisiana. It is not only New Orleans that I cede; it is the whole colony without reserve. I direct you to negotiate the affair. Have an interview this very day with Mr. Livingston."

Suffice it to say that in twenty days from that Easter Sunday, with no time to receive instructions from the home government, the transaction was completed, the treaty of cession was drawn up and signed by Livingston and Monroe on the part of this country and by Barbé-Marbois on the part of France, and this vast inland territory whose boundaries even then were unknown and undetermined, was transferred to the United States for the sum of $15,000,000.00, which proved to be only about two cents an acre, passing from the possession of an intolerant Roman Catholic monarchy to the ownership of a Protestant, liberty-loving Republic, without war or bloodshed.

We can understand the significance of that purchase to-day better than it was understood at that time, but so great and far-reaching is it that even we in the light of subsequent de-

velopments and results find it difficult, if not impossible, fully to comprehend it.

At the time there was serious and vehement opposition to the annexation on the part of many leading citizens. Jefferson, who favored it, though he had nothing to do in shaping the final outcome, "suffered bitter detraction and personal ridicule." Senator Pickering, of Massachusetts, said: "It is declared in the third article (of the treaty) that 'the inhabitants of the ceded territory shall be incorporated in the Union of the United States.' But neither the President and Senate, nor the President and Congress, are competent to such an act of incorporation." Representative Griswold, of Connecticut, said: "The vast and unmanageable extent which the accession of Louisiana will give the United States, the consequent dispersion of our population, and the destruction of that balance which it is so important to maintain between the Eastern and Western States, threatens, at no very distant day, the subversion of our Union." Representative Griffin, of Virginia, said: "He feared the effect of the vast extent of our empire; he feared the effects of the increased

value of labor, the decrease in the value of lands, and the influence of climate upon our citizens who should migrate thither. He did fear (though this land was represented as flowing with milk and honey) that this Eden of the New World would prove a cemetery for the bodies of our citizens." And Senator James White, of Delaware, said: "But as to Louisiana—this new, immense, unbounded world—if it should ever be incorporated into the Union, of which I have no idea, and which can only be done by amending the Constitution, I believe it will be the greatest curse that could at present befall us. It may be productive of innumerable evils, and especially of one that I fear to ever look upon. Our citizens will be removed to the immense distance of two or three thousand miles from the capital of the Union, where they will scarcely ever feel the rays of the General Government—their affections will become alienated; they will gradually begin to view us as strangers—they will form other commercial connections, and our interests will become distinct. And I do say that $15,000,000.00 was a most enormous sum to give."

Such reasoning sounds strangely familiar to our modern ears, who have heard the discussions about Alaska and the Sandwich Islands, and our relations to Cuba, Porto Rico, and the Philippines. The results have proved not only how groundless were their fears in every particular, but that the dreams of the most sanguine came far short of what has been actually realized.

This vast area of the Louisiana Purchase, which is now called the Middle West, comprising fourteen States and Territories, had at the last census a population of nearly 15,000,000, and an estimated wealth of more than six and half billions of dollars. The barren wilderness, as it was sometimes called, which could breed only miasma and death, has become the granary of the nation, and almost of the world, and is found capable of supporting a population many times larger than it yet contains. It is rich in every product that goes to make the wealth of a nation or is necessary for the supply of the needs of an advancing civilization. Its citizens are an inseparable part of the Republic, and vie with the residents of the East in their loyalty and devotion

to the Government and to our American institutions.

And more than that. This large section has given ampler scope for the expansion of the Nation, and for the development of the Republic towards its unfolding destiny. It was but the beginning of that process of expansion, which now covers so large a part of the continent between the two oceans, and has made our Nation a great world-power. The Northwestern section, extending to the Pacific Ocean and to the British possessions, was added by exploration and treaty by the year 1819. Florida was ceded to us by Spain in 1819. Texas was annexed in 1845, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico came to us in 1848. Alaska, which was called Seward's Folly and has become a bonanza of gold and fish and fur of incalculable value, was purchased in 1867 for $7,000,000.00. And since then have come to us what may be called our Island wards, whose future is yet to be determined. When we think of the thirteen original States, just starting out into independent national existence, apparently feeble in resources, without experience and

with no encouraging and inspiring precedent, with no light from behind to guide them, and for whose speedy failure and dissolution many of the wisest statesmen of the old world had only the most melancholy and certain prognostications, we can hardly say that thirteen is an unlucky number. And when we consider the phenomenal growth in population, in wealth, in intelligence and education, in national influence, in everything that makes for national greatness and power, surely we can say "A little one has become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." "Lord, thou hast been favorable unto thy land; thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. Yea, thou hast given that which is good, and our land has yielded her increase."

But the significance of the Louisiana Purchase is perhaps more apparent if we consider it from a religious point of view. In the sale or the purchase the religious motive had no influence or existence. Neither Jefferson nor Napoleon had the slightest thought of the effect upon the religious faith or life of the people, or upon the progress of Christianity, either Protestant or Roman Catholic. France

and Spain were Roman Catholic countries, as intolerant and repressive of religious and civil freedom as such countries have always been, when they have had the power. This country was a free country, a country in which the enunciation of civil liberty as a fundamental principle was accompanied by the proclamation of religious liberty to all the inhabitants thereof. As the Providence of God guided Columbus southward to the West Indies, and possibly saved this country from being a Roman Catholic country, so the Providence of God snatched our great West from the iron grasp of a Roman Catholic power, and opened it to the entrance and the victorious march of an enlightened, liberty-loving, progressive Protestant civilization.

One hundred years ago there were a thousand Roman Catholics west of the Mississippi to a single Protestant, and not a single Protestant church from the great river to the Pacific Ocean. Those who attempted to find settlement there were met with persecution open and unremitting. They were not allowed to meet for worship except under severe restrictions. Marriage, baptism, the observance of the

Lord's Supper according to Protestant usage were all prohibited under cruel penalties. What would have been the condition of things, if the United States had been shut in by Catholic Spain on the South and Catholic France on the West, it is impossible to tell. This we know that thus bounded and hedged in by a wall of superstition and darkness, America could never have become the great Protestant nation that it is, the mightiest Protestant nation on the face of the whole earth, and a great evangelizing agency for all heathen nations. The possession of the West was immediately followed by the entrance of Protestant emigrants, and Protestant missionaries. The first Protestant preacher to enter, it is said, was a Baptist, John Clark, an honored name among the Baptists of Rhode Island, who "went down the Mississippi alone in a small canoe, camping in the woods at night." Another Baptist minister, Thomas Musick, walked from Kentucky to Missouri, and founded the Fee Fee Baptist Church in 1807, a church which is situated within an hour's ride of the grounds of the World's Fair, and is still in vigorous life. This church

is now the mother of 40,000 Protestant churches, nearly 14,000 of which are of the Baptist denomination. Of the twenty-one millions of population west of the Mississippi, six-sevenths, or eighteen millions, are non-Catholic, possessing the spirit of thrift, of intelligence, of independence, of progress, which usually characterizes those who are under no ecclesiastical yoke. It is not too much to say that the marvellous prosperity of the great and still growing West has been due in no small degree to the fact that for a hundred years there has waved over it "the Stars and Stripes," the emblem of a free and independent people, under which the hand is free, the body is free, the mind is free, and the conscience is free, where all the citizens are in possession of certain inalienable rights with which their Maker has endowed them, "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

I can not speak in detail of the great West as a field for religious activity or of the conquests already won there among the native and foreign born populations. It has yielded marvellous returns for all spiritual seed-sowing, and is to-day one in spirit with the older

East, a homogeneous part of our common country, an inheritor of our inspiring traditions, the possessor of that which is highest and best in our American civilization, than which no civilization is higher and better, as loyal, as intelligent, and in large part as Christian, as the States which lie along the Atlantic coast.

Moreover, this great West has now become an open highway to the hoary and unenlightened nations of the Far East. No deserts intervene, no mountains obstruct, no hostile tribes or peoples hinder the progress of our commerce, of our enlightenment, of our civilization, or of our religion. The long searched-for route to Cathay and the fragrant Spice Islands has been discovered. The shortest route to China and Japan is Westward, across the American continent and the Pacific Ocean. Four days and a little more, and you see its waters. Twelve days and a little more, and you touch the shore of the flowery Kingdom. The whole heathen world is within easy reach of our Christian knowledge and out-reaching love. West as well as East, we front the nations of the earth. God has opened to us an

opportunity, and endowed us with resources such as no nation has possessed since the beginning of time, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Let us not forget the hand of our God in our history. Let us not be unmindful of our exalted privilege, of our unlimited ability, of our transcendent destiny. Let us remember that our moral glory must far exceed our material, or we shall be charged with unfaithfulness and doomed to decay, that "his righteousness must go before him and set us in the way of his steps."

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